A Qualitative Study: Undergraduate Students' Attitudes and Beliefs About Marijuana

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Purpose and Background/ Significance: Young adults often initiate marijuana use during college (Suerken et al., 2014) which has resulted in marijuana being reported as the most prevalent illicit drug used on college campuses (Johnston et al., 2012). In a study of 11 U.S. college campuses, the rate of marijuana use over the past month averaged 26.2% (Pearson et al., 2016). Students reported being in favor of legalizing medical marijuana for physical and mental illnesses, legalizing recreational use in adults, and that using marijuana is safer than consuming alcohol (Pearson et al). The objectives of this qualitative study were to assess attitudes and beliefs about marijuana among undergraduate students at a faith-based, Mid-western university.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework: Fitting with social learning theory, beliefs and attitudes towards drug use are derived from a variety of sources including social norms and perceived effects (Bandura, 1986).

Method: Undergraduate students during the 2016-2017 academic year were recruited through general education courses, psychology courses, and campus posters. Because focus groups are an effective way to explore richer expressions of sensitive health topics, data were collected using structured, open-ended questions regarding students' attitudes and beliefs about marijuana. Four groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim; group data were analyzed for trends and categories.

Results: A total of 37 students participated, ranging in age from 18-36 years ($M = 19.9$). Each group consisted of 6-12 students. The majority of students were white (76%), female (59%), and non-Greek affiliated (70%). Nineteen percent of the students reported using marijuana within the last 30 days. Five broad categories were identified: media exposure, attitudes toward use, perceived societal benefits, reasons for usage, and legalization and regulation. Through these broad categories and subcategories, students detailed their beliefs and attitudes about marijuana use and current trends. Discussions about recreational and medicinal use were also explored.

Conclusions: Findings demonstrated students' opinions about marijuana regarding legalization and changing societal views. Students reported increased exposure in various media sources. Additionally, students believe societal attitudes about marijuana use are becoming more relaxed, and they are accepting of its use for both medicinal and recreational purposes.
Abstract Summary:
Marijuana is reported as the most common illicit drug used on college campuses. Through focus group interviews, college students expressed their opinions about the safety, popularity, and legal concerns related to the medicinal and recreational use of marijuana.

Content Outline:

1. Background
   1. Marijuana is the most prevalent drug used on college campuses
   2. Marijuana use in young adults is often initiated in college
   3. College students report being in favor of legalization of marijuana for medicinal purposes, recreational adult use, and that marijuana is safer than alcohol to consume.
2. Purpose
   1. Qualitative study preformed, assessing attitudes and beliefs from undergraduate students about marijuana use in a faith-based, Mid-western university.
3. Method
   1. Undergraduate students recruited through courses and campus posters.
   2. Four focus groups of 6-12 students per group were used.
   3. Open-ended and structured questions were asked about marijuana attitudes and beliefs to the participants.
   4. Transcription of the four focus groups used and analyzed for the study.
4. Sample
   1. 37 students, age 18-36 years old
   2. The participants of the study were primarily white (76%), female (59%), and not affiliated with Greek life (70%)
   3. 19% of participants reported using marijuana in the last 30 days
5. Categories
   1. Media Exposure
   2. Attitudes Towards Use
   3. Perceived Societal Benefits
   4. Reasons for Use
   5. Legalization and Regulation
6. Conclusion
   1. Students report increased exposure to marijuana through multiple media sources.
   2. Students believe societal attitudes about marijuana use are becoming more normalized for both medicinal and recreational purposes.

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**Author Summary:** Olivia Smith, Senior Nursing Student at Valparaiso University, will be one of four presenter for the poster: A Qualitative Study: Undergraduate Students’ Attitudes and Beliefs about Marijuana

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**Author Summary:** Kayleigh Willett, Junior Nursing Student at Valparaiso University, will be one of four presenter for the poster: A Qualitative Study: Undergraduate Students’ Attitudes and Beliefs about Marijuana